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SIPDIS

STATE FOR HAITI TASK FORCE

ROME FOR USFODAG

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: HAITI EARTHQUAKE: DISCUSSION WITH UNESCO DIRECTOR-GENERAL

REF: (A) USUNESCO PARIS FR 000087, (B) USUNESCO PARIS FR 00187

¶1. Ambassador met UNESCO Director-General Irina Bokova February 19 to review issues stemming from the Haiti earthquake. Bokova began by discussing her plans to visit Haiti March 9-10. She said she planned to visit cultural sites on March 9 (accompanied by the Canadian Governor), spend the night hosted by President Preval, and view educational institutions on March 10. The Director-General said she was very sorry to learn that Education Secretary Duncan's schedule would not permit him to accompany her on the second day of her visit. She said he was still welcome if he changed his mind, and that she hoped he would be able to accompany her on a later visit.

¶2. Ambassador asked Bokova whether she was confident that MINUSTAH is doing enough to protect cultural property in Haiti. Bokova replied that UNSYG Ban Ki Moon had assured her that MINUSTAH is trying to do so, and recalled that the Haitian Culture Minister who visited UNESCO on February 15-16 had assured her that this is being done. Reportedly, the Haitian police and private security are involved, although the Culture Minister had admitted that Haitian police capabilities are limited.

¶3. Ambassador reported that he had heard from several sources that little is really being done. The Haitian speakers at UNESCO's February 16 emergency meeting on Haitian cultural property (Ref B) had said private security personnel were checking cultural sites "every one to two hours." This didn't sound like much. Bokova agreed that it did not. She said she had written UNSYG Ban Ki Moon yesterday and had again requested cultural property be protected. Ambassador in turn suggested that she call the UNSYG to reinforce the point. Bokova then had her staff bring to her her letter to Ban. She re-read it, considered a moment, and said I think you're right I need to be stronger. I'll call Ban as soon as I can.

¶4. Comment: The extent to which cultural property in Haiti is being protected is unclear in Paris. We have not been reassured, however, by UNESCO's tendency to rely on formal written communication with UN Headquarters in New York and UN Offices in Port-au-Prince. In the middle of a chaotic and highly stressful situation, we are not certain that the Director-General's polite letters will receive the attention they deserve. It seems to us good that the Director-General plans to reach out by telephone to reinforce the point.

¶5. Port-au-Prince Minimize considered.

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